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Allemann, Lukas

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The Perspective of Former Pupils: Indigenous Children and Boarding Schools on the Kola Peninsula, 1960s to 1980s

Lukas Allemann
University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland

Biographical note: Lukas Allemann is an anthropologist and historian at the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland (Finland). He is currently completing his PhD thesis on the history and consequences of social engineering among Northern indigenous minorities in the Soviet Union, based on the example of the relocation of the Sámi people, and using mainly oral history methods. He holds a master's degree from the University of Basel (Switzerland) in Eastern European history and Russian language and literature.

Indexing words: Boarding schools, remedial schools, Soviet Union, indigenous children, Sámi, Komi, Russian Sápmi, Russian Lapland, Lovozero, Gremikha

Abstract

This chapter examines the history of the Soviet boarding school system between the 1960s and the 1980s in Eastern Sápmi, based on materials created in a co-productive approach to oral history with a long-term fieldwork commitment. The testimonies show that schooling experiences were very heterogeneous in nature. Structural racism and the perpetuation of social hierarchies were dominant patterns in Lovozero, the 'capital' of the Russian Sámi. One of the darkest chapters in the history of such boarding schools took place in the so-called remedial school, where many indigenous children were misdiagnosed as mentally disabled. Being placed in a boarding school in Lovozero was common for indigenous children whose parents lived in the same settlement. This chapter presents several explanations for this apparently paradoxical situation. Gremikha, another settlement with a boarding school, serves as a case for comparison, with less segregation and more positive school experiences. Boarding schools should not be seen as solely responsible for the widespread social despondency among both the parents and children of relocated families, but rather as connected to the preceding mass relocations and as an exacerbating factor. While negative experiences about the school system co-exist with positive ones, the stories show that pupils, parents and teachers could be both victims and agents at the same time.

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Introduction

Together with former pupils, in this chapter I will look into the history of Soviet boarding schools in the Russian part of Sápmi. The testimonies and my interpretations emerged from a corpus of biographic oral history interviews created between 2013 and 2018.¹ The contributors have a Sámi, Komi, Russian or mixed background, and most of the testimonies stem from Lovozero, the administrative centre of the Lovozero district.

Three boarding schools will be discussed in this chapter, for which I will henceforth use the following abbreviations: The native boarding school in Lovozero (NBS; Russian: *natsional'naia shkola-internat*), the remedial boarding school in Lovozero (RBS; Russian: *vspomogatel'naia shkola-internat*) and the boarding school in Gremikha (GBS; Russian: *shkola-internat*). Each section is followed by a set of testimonies about the respective boarding school.

After the closure and relocation of entire indigenous communities, from the 1960s onwards Lovozero became the artificial 'capital' of the Russian Sámi. Lovozero belonged to a category of planned villages for relocated indigenous people who had previously lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic life. Such villages were termed *compact dwelling settlement* (Russian: *mesto kompaktnogo prozhivaniia*, see Slezkine 1994, 340). In their new 'capital', however, the Sámi became a minority comprising about one fifth of the population. The reasons behind the relocations included collectivisation, sedentarisation, economic rationalisation, industrial and infrastructural development, and the requirements of the military. It is beyond the scope of this text to go into more detail about such relocations; they are discussed by Konstantinov (2015, 96–196), Afanasyeva (2013), Allemann (2013), and Gutsol, Vinogradova and Samorukova (2007). The boarding school period discussed in this chapter mainly covers the 1960s to the 1980s.

¹ The interviews were undertaken as part of two projects funded by the Academy of Finland: ORHELIA (Oral History of Empires by Elders in the Arctic, 2011–2015, decision no. 251111), and WOLLIE (Live, Work or Leave? Youth – wellbeing and the viability of (post)-extractive Arctic industrial cities in Finland and Russia, 2018–2020, decision no. 314471).

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While writing this contribution, I was guided by the thought that a historiography of boarding schools for indigenous children could only be created *together with* their former pupils and teachers: co-productive research views the interviewee as on a par with the scholar (see Denzin 2009, 277–305; Allemann and Dudeck 2017). Co-creation should be a valid principle not only while creating the data, but also when it comes to using and displaying it. Allowing space for the collected testimonies to be displayed, without too many comments from an outside authorial position, is an effective way to realise and process what people experienced. It means acknowledging that my oral history interlocutors are not just raw data sources which I tap into and then interpret. Rather, it is primarily the interlocutors who actively interpret, analyse and theorise on their own lives (Bornat 2010), while my role as a scholar is to build my meta-interpretations on top of theirs. My intention with this chapter is to contribute to decolonising research, and I do so by breaking somewhat away from the conventions regarding the form of academic texts, leaving more space than usual for the *primary* interpretations given by the witnesses themselves, besides my *secondary* scholarly interpretations.

Present discussions among former boarding school pupils

While positive and negative remembrances should not be seen as mutually exclusive, we can acknowledge that there is a need to talk about the boarding schools for indigenous children, as they massively changed the lives of individuals and communities, with the repercussions lasting to the present day. Overall, evaluations by former pupils of the boarding school system in Russia's and the Soviet Union's North tend to be highly ambivalent. People often praise the boarding schools for the chances they gave in terms of enabling individuals to climb the ladder in Soviet society to become doctors, engineers, or boarding school teachers themselves. They also express feelings of gratitude and affection towards many of their former educators for their devotion and effort towards lowering the children's stress arising from being far from home. At the same time, former pupils inveigh against the system and some of the staff for stigmatising their social and ethnic background, pushing for

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assimilation and depriving them of parental love. Many children encountered psychological or physical violence.

In terms of traumatic experiences among former indigenous pupils, the RBS in Lovozero stands out, as many children were misdiagnosed as mentally disabled. However, being limited to Russian Sápmi as a case study, and with little existing research on these schools, I was confronted with difficulties in assessing how widespread indigenous overrepresentation in these dooming schools was across the entire, immense Soviet North. A timely discussion on Facebook (Sulyandziga 2018), which I came across by chance, provided the answer. The author of the post condemned illegitimate indigenous overrepresentation in remedial schools in Russia's Far East. The commentators bore witness to the same practices I had heard about in my oral history research across the Russian North. This post showed that there was a need for an open discussion on the practices and consequences of these boarding schools.

The native boarding school in Lovozero

The NBS in Lovozero was the only school in the Murmansk Region with special ethnic profiling. This was a pan-Soviet school category designed to incorporate elements of the respective local non-Russian 'national cultures', with 'national' in Soviet terminology meaning ethnic/native/indigenous (see Brubaker 2002, 178; Martin 1998). Such schools were meant for non-Russian children. The curricula of these schools, even in late Soviet times, remained faithful to what Stalin had already said in 1921: "The essence of the nationality question in the USSR consists of the need to eliminate the backwardness (economic, political, and cultural) that the nationalities have inherited from the past, to allow the backward people to catch up with central Russia" (quoted in Slezkine 1994, 144). Ethnic segregation in education thus aimed at making indigenous people "catch up". Ultimately, those schools pursued a somewhat contradictory equality-through-segregation principle, being designed to offer indigenous children equal chances in Soviet society by mainly transmitting the Soviet majority society's forms of knowledge. With this type of education, indigeneity became firmly limited to cultural elements that were readily visible and understandable as such to outsiders. These

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included handicrafts, songs and sometimes native language tuition. The various nationalities were to develop their own intelligentsia, participate in Soviet life and limit their non-Soviet ethnic identity to the space offered by specific cultural institutions.

Between the 1950s and the 1980s, mainly Sámi and Komi children attended the NBS. Before the large-scale relocations, mainly children from far-away villages, which usually had only an elementary school, went to the boarding school in Lovozero after the fourth grade. From the 1960s onwards, after the mass relocations, also most Sámi children from relocated families attended the NBS, in spite of the fact that their parents lived in the same settlement (Afanasieva 2019; Allemann 2018).

Under such conditions, being placed in the local boarding school instead of in the local daytime school looks, at a first glance, like a paradoxical situation. However, there were manifold, but not obvious, reasons for this, as I have shown previously (Allemann 2018). They included: Firstly, structural racism, resulting from a benevolent paternalistic policy mixed with vague but tenacious prejudices about the otherness and needs of the indigenous population, as shown in this sociological report to the Murmansk Regional Government about the living conditions of the indigenous population:

Currently the indigenous people of the North [in the Murmansk Region] live in comfortable villages and settlements with modern conveniences: Lovozero, Revda [etc.], where the social infrastructure is well-developed: there are apartments with modern facilities, schools and kindergartens, shops, canteens, hospitals, health centres, Houses of Culture (russ. *doma kul'tury*) and clubs. This guarantees the high level of adaptation of the indigenous population in the extreme conditions of the Kola North. (Balakshin 1985, 6)

The former headmaster of the NBS maintained the same kind of paternalistic attitude towards his pupils: "Our children whom we recruit to our boarding school have their own psychological peculiarities, they are slower, less developed, but they are not transgressors" (Commission on Under-age Affairs of the Lovozero District Executive Committee 1973). Secondly, the countrywide long-term goal to create a unified Soviet nation resulted, in practice, in a general policy of Russification, which, among non-Russian nations, was easier to inculcate through boarding schools. And thirdly, the most hidden and locally peculiar reason: a chronic housing shortage after the relocations that led to overcrowded flats and a generally difficult material and psychological situation of the relocated families. An easy way for the

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local authorities to – apparently – alleviate these problems, and to massage the housing statistics, was to send the children of relocated families to the boarding school (Allemann 2018; Afanasieva 2019, 191 f.).

The practice of placing children in the boarding school when their parents lived in the same village was phased out after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the school kept serving children from far-away villages until its final closure in the early 2010s.

Born in the 1960s, NBS²

There was no space to live [referring to the shortage of flats for the relocated families]. When I was visiting my mum [during boarding school leave on weekends], I saw how they lived there. My mum was happy, of course [that I visited her].

Born in the 1940s, elementary daytime school in Voron'e, then NBS, higher education

I hate this place, you know?

Lovozero?

Yes, Lovozero. It's for me ... Well, can you imagine a child after ... I don't remember now, were there four elementary school years? Yes. So, for the fifth grade I had to go to Lovozero [this was before the closure of the interviewee's native village; a few years later the village was closed down and the interviewee's parents were relocated to Lovozero, too]. They tore me away from my family and brought me to Lovozero, and they drilled us like soldiers in the boarding school. They forbade everything. When we went there, we spoke our native language. They forbade us to speak in our native language, only Russian. Imagine. And today, I can say that [[chuckling]] I basically forgot my mother tongue. [...] And so, imagine, we arrived at this boarding school, small kids, where adults had command over us, taught us something, and they didn't allow us to speak in our language. So, we were forced to, when we would go to bed, to whisper between each other in our language, so that nobody else could hear us. That's how it was. And during the daytime we all tried to speak only in Russian. [...] We were small, and we didn't understand anything of these political games. They prohibited it, and so we didn't speak. And when they finally said that we could speak, it was too late. Yes, we had already forgotten our language.

[...]

² Although many interviewees gave their general consent to publish their names, I opted to anonymise the quotations. My decision is due to the sensitivity of the topic up to this day and the mention of other peoples' names by the interviewees. Due to the potential ease of identifying individuals in this small community, I also refrained from indicating the sex and the precise year of birth. All names in the quotations have been changed to fictional ones.

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When we [the rest of the interviewee's family] moved to Lovozero we lived ... they gave us a wooden hut. I don't remember. Either they gave it to us, or my parents had to rent it. There were two families living there: my parents' family and my mother's sister's family. The smallest kids lived with them, of course. But we, all the others, studied and lived at the boarding school because with only two small rooms [for both families] there was simply not enough space.

[...]

They always reminded us that the clothes that we wore must be clean, that you always needed to take care of the way you looked. [...] All in all, I am very thankful that they taught me this in the boarding school. I don't know if I would have learned all this living at home. Although my parents, I must say, stood out for being very clean and neat people; they were always held up as an example.

[...]

I wouldn't say slow progress [about bad grades among pupils]. They were simply not interested at all in studying. Absolutely not interested. They just wanted to go home, to their parents, where they could be in their usual environment, where they could speak in their own language, where they didn't feel any interdictions. But we [my friend and I], when we came to the boarding school, we decided to study hard. Me and her, we finished [high] school. When we were already in about the seventh grade, we told each other: "Okay, we will study well. We will finish [high] school, and we will get a higher education, no matter what." We kind of swore it to each other. And we did it!

[...]

About the boarding school, I just remember this permanent homesickness. It was all the time, but at the same time, I want to say that the boarding school gave me very much, you know?

Born in the 1960s, NBS, higher education

There was some kind of dictate to get the children away from their families. That was really bad. Quintessentially, the boarding school should have been meant for kids whose parents were in the tundra, who were not in the village. And that's how it was initially. Or for the children from remote settlements like Kanevka, Sosnovka and Krasnoshchel'e.

Yes-yes.

But then they introduced this rule that all kids should sleep at the boarding school. That was, of course, a bit on the heavy side.

Born in the 1950s, NBS, higher education

Of course, they used to shave our heads. But there were certain kids whom they wouldn't shave. They had to be A-graders, so this was like an incentive.

So, could you deserve not to be shaved?

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Yes [[laughing]]! For example, Ira's sister, she always had the best grades, so they didn't shave her. But us, the eternal run-aways, they would shave us without hesitation.

[...]

For a child to visit home at the weekend, the parents had to apply for a certificate from the hygiene and disinfection department [Russian: *sanitarno-epidemiologicheskaja sluzhba*], confirming that the conditions at home were okay for the kids.

That was quite humiliating for the parents, wasn't it?

Well yes. It meant that they came to your home to check your bed linen, you know, those bugs in your hair. It all had to be done in due order. Although we were bald anyway! [...] And when the herders came back from the tundra, of course, we used to wash all the clothes, to boil them. Our people knew how to fight against this. Yes ... But the mentality of the others was that we were always full of bugs, dirty people, and so on. That's how they were brought up. My mum though, she was always saying: "They use the same bucket for washing their hair, their feet and the floor, while we have separate buckets for every task [[laughing]]."

[...]

But my [younger] brother, maybe the times had already changed a little bit, he successfully fought for his right to live at home. They were so fed up with him! [...] He would just go away, away from the village, where his mum was in the fields for the haymaking. Or in winter, he would take his boots and his hat and walk all the way, fifteen kilometres. And so finally they gave up, so the child wouldn't go completely ... [mad]. He was simply stubborn.

[...]

It's not that we just became resigned to it, no, I liked being there [at the NBS]. At home, you had to heat up the stove, bring water and collect the wood chips. Lots of duties [which we didn't have at the boarding school]. And they also fed you well. And yes, we all [the former pupils] don't like cooking, for us this is like ... I was in Russian families, and I can't imagine spending so much time cooking [[laughing]]. I'm not a good housewife. Only cleaning, that's not a problem, they taught us that [at school] [[chuckling]].

Born in the 1950s, NBS

I remember it very well, yes, when earlier we would have dancing parties at the House of Culture. Those evenings would last until eleven pm. We were in the ninth–tenth grade, and that was only on Saturdays. But inevitably, as soon as the clock struck ten, somebody from the boarding school would enter the hall and say: "Alright, all boarding school children [Russian: *vse internatskie*] back to the boarding school!" That was like a stab in the heart. That was so ... that was so humiliating.

So were the dancing evenings for all the teenagers from the whole settlement?

Yes, for the youth. "Alright, all boarding school children back to the boarding school!" And then you think "Oh my god." You leave, and there were all the teenagers from Revda [the neighbouring settlement]. "Look, there she goes," they would say. They called out to us:

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"The incubator kids [*batorskie*] are going". *Bator* [a slang abbreviation of *inkubator*].

The remedial boarding school in Lovozero

The RBS in Lovozero was opened in 1970. Remedial schools were special schools within the countrywide system for mentally 'deviant' children. On this pan-Soviet level, these schools were officially unrelated to the state's nationality policies and to ethnic markers. However, in Lovozero, the RBS was almost half as large as the district's boarding school for intellectually 'regular' children. Pupils of Sámi origin were transferred from the NBS to the RBS more often than average, ending up being heavily over-represented in the latter. While the school was also filled with mentally disabled non-indigenous children from all over the Murmansk Region, there was frequent misdiagnosing among the local indigenous children.

Such wrongful appointments to the RBS were mainly due to the indifferent application of Eurocentric norms about valid forms of knowledge and intellect – a colonial attitude, which has been criticised in relation to both 'Western' Arctic states and the USSR/Russia (Choate 2018; Arshavskii and Rotenberg 1991). In Lovozero, children recommended by teachers for transfer from the NBS to the RBS were tested via a countrywide, standardised assessment system enacted by groups of experts. These groups were called medical-pedagogical commissions. The forms of knowledge tested in order to assess the intellectual capacities of children presupposed a Soviet – meaning urbanised and Russianised – background; they were not locally adapted and hence not suitable for the indigenous children's knowledge systems and socio-cultural environment. For example, the task of describing a parrot or an oak could baffle a first-grader who had grown up mostly in the tundra without elements of the majority culture such as kindergarten tuition or television. While many children were afraid of and also threatened with being transferred to this school by teachers, there was also a strategy of making this school look attractive to children due to its easier curriculum and shorter lessons. Many misdiagnosed children had been brought to the commission unaccompanied by a parent or other guardian – which was against the rules. Besides that, the school's staff, who enjoyed higher salaries than in regular schools, had a self-interest in receiving a constant supply of pupils.

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Upon graduation, a certificate was issued including the words 'mental deficiency' (Russian: *debil'nost'*), which strongly limited further educational and professional opportunities. Many former pupils left the settlement because of the stigma ensuing from attending this school and successfully obtained vocational or higher education elsewhere. In Lovozero, traumatic consequences, including suicide, were common. The school was closed down in the early 1990s in the wake of changes in special education approaches and the country's difficult economic situation. This entire section is a summary from Allemann (2018), where further references can be found.

Born in the 1930s, daytime school in Teriberka, higher education in Leningrad, teacher, headmaster of the RBS in the 1970s, later well-known Sámi language revivalist and linguist

Children are children, living beings. They may want to fool around, sometimes creating trouble during the lessons, and not everybody respected and accepted the teacher's reprimands. And so, the issue was raised: Kids who don't behave themselves, who don't listen to the teachers, who lag behind, we just send them to the remedial school. It started with two–three kids and ended up with a separate school [before the RBS opened, there were remedial classes in the regular school].

[...]

About that group, I mean, those scientists who came to select the children [referring to the medical-pedagogical commission], they would just transfer as many kids as the school headmaster had listed [...]. The kid ... I was present myself at those commission hearings ... they would ask him questions and he [[sighing]] didn't think that they were testing him. And what if he gave the wrong answers? The child was just looking at those commission members [[chuckling]]. They looked so interesting to the kids: people from the city, wearing different clothes, and so on. While the kid was scrutinising them, he had already forgotten about the question and didn't know what to answer.

[...]

For example, the headmaster and the teacher decided together that this was a demanding child; he had to be transferred to the remedial school. That's how it worked. If the teacher recommended, say, five children, all five would go. The headmaster would hand over the list to the commission, and they transferred them.

[...]

Later, they closed the remedial school. And that was good. It seems that there were more Sámi children in that school, but there were also Komi and Russian kids. Among the Russian kids, there were children who were ill, really ill.

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Born in the 1950s, NBS, higher education

We also had this school for morons. It thoroughly shook the people up [[chuckling]].

Here [in Lovozero]?

Yes, there was this remedial school here [...]. People treated them like real morons. Of course, when they just opened this school, they disguised it all in well-meaning intentions. That the kids from the tundra had language difficulties, that because of this they needed a different programme in terms of education. And that, in general, Sámi children had a difficult life, that they were very sleepy in winter and so on. In fact, well, they were convincing our kids. I remember this, my sister was an excellent pupil. They came to her class and said – that was in the third or second grade, when half of their class was moved to the remedial school – they said: "The lessons will last not 45 but only 35 minutes, and you'll have more holidays." So, they were trying to talk the children into it. Two free days [the normal schools had lessons six days a week], better food. Well, to the kids, of course [it sounded attractive] that the lessons were shorter, studying was easier, there was less homework, more holidays and free days. "Hands up who wants to go there." [...] Of course, they enrolled mainly those kids whose parents were away in the tundra. My sister, they first enrolled her, too, but my grandma came there, she was old, but she quickly understood what this was all about. "How can you enrol her in the morons' school [Russian: *debilka*]" – that's how they used to say it – "if she's a straight-A student?" They just had to fill this school. [...] And how they were testing if we were ... there was this commission that tested the children: "How heavy is the chicken if it stands on one leg and if it stands on two legs?" Those were the kinds of tests they were formally sticking to. Those who had put their hands up, they had to undergo these tests to check if they were intellectually suitable for the remedial school. I remember, the testing was in the teachers' room, there was a queue of kids, some were crying. There were also some who understood what that school was about. Not everybody was eager to be transferred there. [...] For example, Liuda [the interviewee's former classmate], she even got a higher education later. Those kids had to catch up in night school [as adults] because upon graduation from the remedial school, their educational level corresponded to the fifth or sixth grade. At that time, they had this kind of night school. And, after that, she went to college, graduated, and is now head of a kindergarten in [another city in Russia]. But she doesn't come here [to Lovozero]. She says: "How can I come, everybody remembers that I was in that school for morons." A whole generation was knocked out. [...] Such was the life of this generation. And those who managed to challenge this fate simply left for a place where people wouldn't know what kind of school they had been to [[sighing]], and basically they started a new life.

Born in the 1950s, NBS, higher education

I remember my sister came home and said: "You know what?" I said: "What? What happened?" She said: "I want to ... they told me that I could apply to go to the remedial school, and then I would leave earlier for the tundra [for summer holidays]!" We said: "Forget about this immediately!" She started to cry and left. I mean, you could just file an application [to be transferred to the RBS].

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Born in the 1960s, daytime school in Revda, transferred to the RBS, later went to the night school

"Do you want to go to the boarding school [the RBS]? There are plenty of kids and toys, and you will always eat good food." – "Why are you asking, you'll send us there anyway." And so, they transferred us. That was in March 1971.

[...]

In our class [at the RBS] I was the only Russian. He [the interviewee's brother] at least had other Russian kids in his class. But I was the only Russian in my class, all the others were Sámi and Komi.

[...]

I and Kolia [the interviewee's brother], we often used to run away from the boarding school. Very often. We once even fled to Karelia. On freight wagons. Who would pay for our ticket! We would also hitchhike.

But it's not easy to get out of Lovozero [there is only one road], who would take you?

Yes, yes, as free-riders on the bus, or hitchhiking, whatever. Also walking. But what I wanted to say is that there were punishments for running away. With the girls, they were more merciful. Imagine, it's summer [holidays], you want to run around, have fun outside, but they strip you naked, damn, and you have to stick to your bed for a week or two. They'll only let you go to the toilet. Yes, there was such a thing.

Such a punishment?

Yes. But the boys! How many boys' lives they screwed up! Because of that my brother couldn't go to the army. They would send them [as a punishment] to Apatity [a nearby city] to the psychiatric hospital for two–three months. They were treated there, it would seem, with psycho-pharmaceuticals. Once they were back, it took them a long time to recover. Can you imagine what condition they were in?

They were sending kids to the psychiatric hospital?

Yes! Yes, yes. I don't know exactly what they were doing there with them, but some kind of experiment, it would seem. Later, when he [the interviewee's brother] would get drunk, my mum and I were very afraid of him. He did not know what he was doing.

[...]

They could also shave your head, "don't be a girl anymore". Imagine, girls, 13–14 years old, they played pranks, they would take them, of course, they wouldn't ask them. Imagine, she was a teenager, all of a sudden with a shaved head.

That was meant as humiliation.

Of course, of course.

Maybe under the pretext of hygienic measures?

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Just to humiliate her and to discourage others.

[...]

Until May, our teacher [at the NBS] was Anna Alekseevna, she was the one who assigned us [to the RBS]. Half of the class she sent there, half! We were a huge class, classes were very big at the boarding school [the NBS]. [...] And half of it she sent away [to the RBS], so that we were split into two classes of fifteen–sixteen people. [...] And they took me, too.

The nexus between boarding schools and post-relocation social despair

Placing children in boarding schools was a practice both welcomed and resisted by families relocated to Lovozero. It was partially welcomed, because the material conditions in the schools were better than the overcrowded conditions in relocated families' homes (Afanasieva 2019, 191 f.). Child removal through the state as a solution to problems created by the same state was, however, perceived as an ignominious practice, turning relocated parents into 'bad parents'.

The strengths or weaknesses of the parental background were a decisive factor in a child's educational path. Parents or other relatives who were aware of the situation, who enjoyed a secure social position and who were simply present in the village were more likely to successfully influence which school their child would be sent to. However, many of the relocated parents were limited in their possibilities to intervene, for several reasons: they still belonged to a generation with poor literacy; they were frequently absent for tundra work; additionally, after their relocation, many families were plagued by social issues such as a lack of acceptance by locals, chronic housing shortages, and a lack of suitable employment (see literature on relocations cited above). This led to widespread alcohol abuse and violence, with a more than twofold increase in violent death causes between pre-relocation and post-relocation times, with a violent death share of more than fifty percent during the 1970s (Bogoiavlenskii and Kozlov 2008). This situation led to a recursive loop: While social destitution after relocations motivated the administrative separation of children from their families (Konstantinov 2015, 148 f.), the separation itself in many cases contributed to the further despondency of parents deprived of their children. As we can see from some of the quotations, following a typical transgenerational trauma pattern (Atkinson, Nelson, and

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Atkinson 2010), social despondency, including suicide and homicide, also spread to the relocated families' children.

Born in the 1960s, daytime school in Revda, transferred to the RBS, later went to the night school

We were 13–14 years old. We were already smokers. And so, she took us to her home; there were her drunken uncles. Her grandmother [...] was always at work, 'cause she had to feed them, but those [uncles] didn't want to work, they drank. And so, they would give us drink. Well they were doing nothing else with us; they knew they could go to jail for that. But they were making fun of observing us when we became drunk. And all of a sudden there was somebody knocking at the door. We checked; it was the teachers. Our educators already knew where to look for us. They knocked: "Open this door, quickly, what's that, we have to fetch the children!" [[laughing]]. Finally, they opened the door, and we were drunk, imagine, drunken children. [...] And then, after the school years were over, they arrested Masha. She wasn't working anywhere and she was put to jail for being jobless.

Parasitism [Russian: *tuneiadstvo*].

By then [when Masha came out of the correction camp] her grandma had already died, Sasha [one of the drinking uncles] had hung himself, and Vasja [the other drinking uncle] had died from tuberculosis. And Masha ... it was very strict then about being registered [Russian: *propiska*, a permanent, official address], [...], three months without registration and they could arrest you. And so, she started living with an elderly man [...], he was over fifty then. But she had no choice, because of this registration, and she gave birth to a boy from him. [...] She was twenty-one when she came back from the camp. And one [day], they were drinking, and their boy was seven months old. And they went to check the [fishing] nets with the baby. And they all drowned. The baby was never found [...], but they found him and her. She was also Sámi. This kind of death was all around, imagine.

Yes, plenty.

Born in the 1930s, elementary daytime school in Varzino, GBS, higher education

[About her relatives in Lovozero:] In 1982, their son, Andrei, died. He hung himself, and in '82 Fedia was already dead, too, or maybe it was in '80–'81. And Anatolii hung himself in '82. In those years, Pasha also hung himself. Their entire family fell to pieces. I don't know why, maybe because the parents drank and let things slide. In Lovozero, you know, I can't really explain it, but there was a kind of tacit asperity, when there's physical violence among the kids towards each other. Beating each other up, and so badly that it hurt.

The kids among themselves or the parents towards the kids?

No-no, the kids among themselves. And I don't really understand the reasons, but Pasha was such a quiet boy, and he did this to himself.

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The boarding school in Gremikha

Gremikha, a settlement on the Barents Sea coast, stands apart from Lovozero not only geographically but also in terms of generally more positive boarding school experiences. Being an important military base, it had also a very different social composition and schooling history for its indigenous children. Before the closure of most of the smaller coastal villages, the GBS hosted many indigenous coastal children. However, according to my informants, placement in the GBS was not limited to indigenous children, as children from military families deployed to the North and from Russian coastal families attended it, too. Compared to the NBS in Lovozero, it lacked any specifically 'national' (i.e. non-Russian) features in its curriculum. This lack of formalised features in the curriculum directed towards the indigenes of the children led to a less biased attitude by teachers. We can say that mixing the children independently of their provenience was in line with today's widely accepted paradigm that inclusion should always be favoured instead of segregation (Allemann-Ghionda 2015).

The GBS was closed down in the 1960s, as there were no more distant villages left and – contrary to the 'ethnic' village of Lovozero – there was no practice of sending indigenous children to the boarding school when their parents lived in the same village. This can be explained by the fact that there was no special 'indigenous' profiling of the settlement and no housing shortage, as there was in Lovozero (see also Afanasieva 2019, 27 f., 157 f., 183-185).

Born in the 1930s, elementary daytime school in Lumbovka, GBS, higher education, worked as a teacher in Gremikha

It was the influence. I don't remember speaking at the boarding school in our own language. Face to face, quietly, yes. But in public, no. What I knew I actually forgot. If I had lived in the village ... Firstly, to Iokan'ga [a Sámi village, closed down in 1963], I only used to go there for the holidays. And, secondly, in the boarding school, I didn't hear our language, and so the language quietly disappeared from my mind.

[...]

Our educators [at the GBS] were very good. I remember several of them. They were remarkable people [...], we had very good teachers. [...] Our kids went for higher education to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

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[...]

There we had also [military] officers' families, soldiers' families. Their kids were also at our boarding school. And not only natives went to this school but also Russian kids. Because in Lumbovka there were also Russian families [...]. In every [pre-relocation] village there were also Russian families.

Born in the 1930s, GBS, higher education, worked as a teacher in Lovozero

I warmly remember the Gremikha boarding school. Here [in Lovozero] they would have sent me to the nuthouse.

You mean the remedial school?

Yes, I told them once directly, during one of our teachers' meetings, I said if I had gone to school here, I, who spoke Sámi and almost no Russian, they would have sent me to the remedial school [laughing]. [...] Mainly children of reindeer herders were sent to the remedial school because their parents in the tundra had been speaking in Sámi to them.

Conclusion: Different schools, different opportunities

While former pupils often warmly remember their devoted educators and teachers, and many appreciate the professional opportunities, which they got through their education, the symbolic violence (Bourdieu et al. 1991) exerted by the boarding school system cannot be underestimated. In Lovozero, placement in the NBS, and, in many cases subsequently, in the RBS, was an effective mechanism for social exclusion and for the perpetuation of social hierarchies (Bourdieu and Champagne 1999); this chiefly concerned the families who were relocated to Lovozero from the villages that had been closed down – and these families were mostly of Sámi origin. In terms of boarding and remedial schooling, it was likelier for children from such families to fall prey to the system without being protected by any counter-force. However, the schools should not be seen as solely responsible for the ensuing social despondency, but rather as connected to the preceding mass relocations and as a factor exacerbating the negative consequences of these relocations.

In Gremikha, the GBS was not designed to account for the 'different' backgrounds of indigenous children. The lack of segregating affirmative action towards indigenous children reflects in consistently more positive feelings towards this school by its former pupils, as

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opposed to those who went to school in Lovozero. Speaking the Sámi language during lessons was, in practice, forbidden in all schools.

All schools were responsible for a drastic drop in the number of Sámi-language speakers. We can indeed speak of the "broken generation" (Vakhtin 1992, 18): children were pushed, and at times forced, not to use their indigenous language at school; at the same time, they faced difficulties in school because Russian was not their mother tongue.

However, within this frame of cultural assimilation, we can see a large number of ways in which pupils coped, depending on their own and their families' agency as well as on chance. These ways ranged from accommodating and using the offered opportunities for a successful education and professional life within the frames of the majority society, to being strongly limited by the system in terms of personal development and life opportunities.

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